



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Note: Satellite coordinates are listed at the end of this release.

State Releases Juvenile Justice Reform Plan ***Governor Blanco: Hurricanes Underscore Importance of Reforms***

BATON ROUGE, La. – State officials released the Administration's juvenile justice reform plan today. The plan is designed to strengthen programs aimed at turning young people's lives around through a greater focus on rehabilitation, regional services, partnerships, family involvement and staff training. It sets specific strategies and a timeline for achieving results.

Simon Gonsoulin, Deputy Secretary of the state Office of Youth Development, which oversees juvenile justice, presented the plan to participants in the Governor's Conference on Juvenile Justice, sponsored by the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement.

Governor Blanco, who was traveling to Washington, D.C. to testify at a Congressional hearing on the state's response to Hurricane Katrina, sent a message to the group that the need to reform juvenile justice is even greater now than before.

"Katrina and Rita have shown us that our commitment to the way we care for our children is more important than ever. Rebuilding Louisiana depends on families – strong, empowered families equipped with the tools they need to succeed," Blanco said.

Louisiana's reform effort gained momentum two years ago when the Legislature passed the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2003, which created the Juvenile Justice Implementation Commission and prompted the development of a strategic plan. The effort intensified last year when Gov. Blanco made juvenile justice reform a top priority of her administration, separating juvenile justice from adult corrections in the earliest days of her administration.

The reform effort has attracted national attention and renowned partners, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and representatives from the Missouri Youth Services Institute and the Missouri Division of Youth Services, which is widely considered a national model of juvenile justice reform.

Louisiana's reform plan is the result of several months of public discussion about the most effective way to transition from a correctional, custodial model of juvenile justice to one that is more therapeutic and child centered. The plan reflects the input of about 1,600 community members who attended 10 regional meetings this summer – elected officials, court representatives, school officers, parents, advocates, local and state agency representatives, and law enforcement officials -

- as well as the guidance of consultants from the Casey Foundation and the Missouri partners.

Louisiana's plan covers the areas of safety, family involvement, continuum of care, community involvement and partnership and data-driven outcomes. It calls for:

- A therapeutic approach that helps youth develop good decision making skills so they become productive and responsible citizens
- Seamless case management that provides stability and meets the individual needs of youth by having one person manage the youngster's services from start to finish in the system.
- Regionalization that keeps youth closer to home and encourages family and community involvement
- A continuum of care that meets the needs of youth in the least-restrictive environment possible. The range of services will go from supervision and monthly contact to intensive residential programs such as secure care.
- Continuous professional development that builds committed, capable staff and leaders
- Data-driven practice that measures outcomes and drives improved policy and practice.

OYD will release reports on its performance twice a year and make them public on the agency's website at www.oyd.louisiana.gov.

"This plan reflects Governor Blanco's vision as she expressed it to me early in her administration -- reduce recidivism, commit fewer young people to secure care, keep youngsters closer to home where family and community members can participate in their therapy and increase the amount of family involvement overall. This plan reflects an unprecedented level of unity and cooperation from diverse groups who believe that, given the right programs, we can help young people turn their lives around. This same spirit will make the reforms a reality that we can all be proud of," Gonsoulin said.

Former Missouri Division of Youth Services Director Mark Steward commended Governor Blanco and OYD officials for their continued commitment to the reforms.

"The citizens of Louisiana should be very proud of the accomplishments made to date in reforming their juvenile system. Despite the setbacks caused by the hurricanes, the reform efforts have continued and the programs for the troubled youth of Louisiana are well on their way to becoming a successful rehabilitation system," Steward said.

The reform plan is available on OYD's website at www.oyd.louisiana.gov.

The Louisiana Office of Youth Development serves about 5,000 youth in community-based programs, parole and probation programs and at secure care facilities including Bridge City, Jetson Center for Youth near Baton Rouge and Swanson Center for Youth in Monroe.

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Satellite Coordinates:

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| Date: | Monday, Dec. 12, 2005 |
| Time: | 2:45pm-3:00pm Central |
| Satellite: | I A 5 (five) (C-band analog) |
| Transponder: | C-13 (thirteen) |
| Downlink Freq: | 3960 mhz. Vertical |
| Audio: | 6.2 - 6.8 |
| Trouble: | 225-336-2268 |

More info: La. Office of Youth Development www.oyd.louisiana.gov

